Desolation Walk: A Journey of Survival and Hope

by Jonathan Olvera

I wake up in the morning, drowsy. The bright sun fills the room. I need water. I feel the heat on my forehead, enduring the pounding headache. The bills are due. I get up and make my way to the bathroom. I wash my face with a green bar of soap and look in the mirror. "Good morning!" I say to myself. "It's so hot! Oh, it's exhausting!"

I step out of the small bathroom in my sheet-metal trailer home, dizzy and a bit afraid. I take two steps into my room and grab a towel, fresh underwear, and clothes for the day. After undressing, I turn on the shower, thinking about women and my need to impress an employer. I shower, feeling a small pleasure in completing the task. I continue to get ready, preparing my boots—it's a new day out in our territory. I speak aloud, "Oh goodness, another day."

In Arizona, the scene is always busy with the efforts of migrants, laborers, and other workers eager to continue the work of those before them. My door leading outside is simple, with a knob and a lock. I keep a key on a lanyard. I'm grateful to have shelter, running water, and a small electricity allowance. I unlock the door, turn the knob, and pull it open. The sun shines as I step outside, down from the platform and onto the old, hard-packed dirt. Memories flood back—clearings, formations, roads, trade paths. I look around and focus on my objectives for the day, searching for a way to earn a dollar.

I walk forward to the end of the park and step onto the geometric concrete path. After a few minutes, excitement builds up in me. "Any new tasks?" I ask myself aloud. "What's there to do today?" I always

make sure I’m not talking to an audience. Moving westward, I come to an intersection with flags of victories and riches decorating the paths before me. I feel like a pawn on a chessboard. I take a right turn, moving northward. The burning sun is high in the sky, the air thinner than usual, drying my throat. Realizing I forgot water, I ran back to my trailer, up the stairs, and unlocked the door. Hurriedly, I grab my backpack, fill it with three water bottles, and step outside again, locking up. Ready for a new day, I think, This is a battle. In our time.

Careful not to trip on rocks, wood, or concrete, I hurry back to my original spot. "This is desolation!" I think, imagining King Mosiah's exile. The new steel structures around me are always changing. To my left is a bus stop. Down the central road over the Salt River is a passenger train. I check my pocket for leftover coins from previous jobs. "What does the moon bring to the table?" I wonder. I must work, to be prepared. I decide to sit on the steel structure, waiting thirty minutes for the propane community bus. Looking left, right, and up at the sky, I’m grateful.

Soon, I spot the mechanics, carbon, and sheet metal rolling by. Could this be a problem for us? I think. The visible efforts to keep going. I say to myself, "This is commonplace." I feel intimidated, but I must continue. Closing my eyes, then opening them, I see the bus arriving. I step on and make my way to the front. "Good day!" I say to the driver.

"Pay the fare," he replies. I reach into my pocket, pull out the fare, and insert it into the machine. "Thank you!" I say.

"No worries," he responds.

I look around at the faces on the bus, some I recognize from the local area. Finding a seat, I settled in, only riding down the street and over the bridge to catch the train to the downtown sector. As we move, I glance out the window briefly, preferring instead to look at my fingernails. After a few minutes, I reach my stop and pull the cord. I thank the driver aloud, stepping off the platform and onto the concrete landing. The sun is still high, and the train station lies ahead across the landing. I look left, then right, making sure it’s safe before crossing.

Once across, I sit in my usual spot to wait. The train will arrive in about fifteen minutes, heading east or northwest. As I sit, I think, Oh, I’m going to need water. This is nice. I enjoy daydreaming about rocks, metal, sand, and debris. Center Square—one of many clearings in the area—is a desolate landscape, surrounded by tall buildings, hotels, and timeshare rentals, marking the perimeter of this made city. I close my eyes and drift off, thinking not to observe too much.

The train bell rings in the distance, and I open my eyes, now sure the train is close. It pulls forward and stops. I board for an eastward ride. The morning sun bakes down as I search for food. You eat meat, I think. It’s a good source of protein. Could that be a problem for us?

I step off the train at the platform, standing in my boots and green pants, which set me apart from the brown commonly worn to deter thieves or prospectors. I turn and see my objective: the local airport where I hope to find an employer. What else is there to do? I think. Exactly what I got up for.

"Church is for children. The temple is for men," I mutter, climbing the new electric staircase. At the top, I enter through a modern steel structure, hoping it will look even nicer in the future. Walking past the ticket kiosk inside, I observe. It’s all geometric. I think, I’m looking for work. Inside, a passage leads to a chamber with a lobby where people wait for the sky train. "That’s a good service!" I say aloud. Through an open window, I can see the constant clamor, the depletion of gold and silver, the barricades, the clock, and the friction of politics. It’s awful, I think, as a headache pulses. I don’t feel it’s right to participate. Still, I wait for the new addition to the station, the sky train.

To be continued…